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AUTHOR Zsiray, Stephen W., Jr.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Ninth grade poses unique academic, physical, social, and emotional challenges to students; in fact, it may be the defining year for predicting high school success. It could also be the last chance to catch pupils who are in danger of dropping out of school. The Freshman Center program attempts to give ninth graders the opportunity to succeed. This paper describes the program, presents a case study of two Freshman Centers, and includes many questions and responses about the program. The North and South Cache Freshman Centers were organized to meet those unique needs of ninth graders as they move through the transition to high school. Curriculum, accountability, and quality control were important elements of the ninth grade program development. The South Cache Freshman Center (510 students) promotes success, respect, and responsibility by developing a Student Educational and Occupational Plan (SEOP) and a portfolio for each student. Additionally, 15 to 20 hours are spent with students exploring careers and charting a direction through high school. The North Cache Freshman Center (600 students) utilizes integrated interdisciplinary units and SEOPs to prepare the ninth graders for a progressive high school with competency-based teaching. An outline of the 1995-96 South Cache Freshman Center schedule is included. (LSR)

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Everybody Needs to Feel Like Somebody: Building a Ninth Grade Program to Reflect Student Needs

Stephen W. Zsiray Jr., Gregory Larsen and Michael Liechty. 1996 Annual NASSP Convention, February 23-27, 1996 in San Francisco, CA

Abstract

The authors describe a process used to develop a program to ease the transition for students from the ninth grade to the high school setting. Two 'stand-alone' Freshman Centers were organized to meet the unique academic, physical, social and emotional needs of ninth graders. Our fundamental belief, based upon discussions with high school students, is that ninth grade is the defining year for predicting high school success. The Freshman Center program is an attempt to give ninth graders the opportunity to succeed. It could be our last chance to catch pupils who are in danger of dropping out of school. The presentation describes the program, presents a case study of both North and South Cache Freshman Centers, and includes the responses to the many questions posed by the individuals who attended the session.

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Everybody Needs to Feel Like Somebody: Building a Ninth Grade Program to Reflect Student Needs

Stephen W. Zsiray Jr., Gregory Larsen and Michael Liechty. 1996 Annual NASSP Convention, February 23-27, 1996 in San Francisco, CA

Introduction

Our presentation is titled, "Everybody Needs to Feel Like Somebody - Building a Ninth Grade Program to Reflect Student Needs". We will talk to you today about some issues of transition from middle school to high school. We feel this is a somewhat neglected topic. We have some notions about the transition from middle school to high school that we think are worth sharing. Many times you come to a presentation like this and the flavor is all, "gee look at us, aren't we neat"? It is a struggle, we're still building some things, the programs aren't going as we'd expected and we hope to get some ideas from our audience.

We want to talk about the students we serve and we'll go back about 80 years and reflect on the words of G.H. Hill. He, in 1916, likened adolescence to a time of storm and stress. That sounds very much like what we deal with when we work with transitioning middle schoolers into our ninth grade programs. What we're trying to do is calm the white water years of adolescence, or at least help our students find a stable river raft to navigate through the transitional years and bring meaning to the up-coming high school experience. In this session we will:

1. define the nature of the ninth grade.
2. examine where the students fit.
3. discuss how we built our program.
4. describe our ideas, and what we hope for.

We are in our second year of a ninth grade "stand-alone" center which we call Freshman Centers, but many of the concepts we talk about could easily be set up in a school within a school, within an existing 9-12 high school or a 7-8-9 Jr. High. We will describe two case studies, North

Cache Freshman Center and South Cache Freshman Center, two very unique programs. After our presentation, we invite you to ask questions.

How did we begin the restructuring process Many times when engaged in restructuring, the basic organizational elements often act as barriers to innovation. George Melton has described these basics as the three B's: budgets, buildings and buses. Usually when we make a decision in education one or more of these three controlling factors have an impact. In our case the focus was on buildings. Our school district serves 13,000 students. Growing at a rate of 3 to 5% a year, the need to build facilities or get creative with existing buildings or try to decide the best grade level configuration using existing buildings. After careful consideration, we decided to build a ninth grade program that had strong couplings to our middle school program as well as providing a transition to a high school environment.

Margaret Wheatley's book, *Leadership in the New Science* (1992), provided key ideas in dealing with change and designing and developing new organizational structures. The three elements described were: vision, information and relationships. Our planning process was based on these three elements. Our vision was to build an program that would reflect the needs of all students. We started about two years before we actually began operating the ninth grade programs. It was also important to begin to build relationships with the community. In building community support for the program, we involved members of the PTA in the planning process.

Our next step was to collect information. What do these ninth grade kids look like? What do they do? How do they act in those ninth grade programs or any program for that example? Some basic descriptions of what these teenagers are all about:

- They need to develop their own values and be sure they are not just parroting their parents ideas.
- They have to find out what they can do and be proud of their own accomplishments.
- They want to develop close relationships with boys and girls their own age.
- They want to be liked and loved and respected for who they are and what they stand for.

The most important task of the adolescent is the search for identity which can occur in three general many ways, these are: 1) By developing values, 2) by developing pride in one's achievements and 3) by developing close relationships with peers.

How can we grab this idea of searching for identity? How can we build a school program that will allow these kids to search for their identity; to find out who they are and to build a transition into the high school? Where do these kids fit? Will they taste success in a stand alone ninth grade configuration?

James Conant (1960) wrote, " there is no consensus whatsoever among educators as to the place of grade nine in the organization framework". Thirty-three years later, John Lounsbury (1988), stated, "we are still struggling with a placement of ninth grade students." Lounsbury was co-editor of a book entitled, "*How Fares the Ninth Grade?*" In the book many questions were asked about what we do with ninth graders and where do we place these students. There is little literature dealing with ninth grade placement. A dissertation come out of the University of Nebraska last spring that compared students in ninth grade centers with students in 7-8-9 Jr. highs and 9-12 senior high schools. It is an interesting study with some mixed results. The researchers looked at parent, teacher, and student feelings and attitudes about those programs.

We wanted to collect information from students so we asked students from our two high schools about their high school experience and how it could be improved. Students indicated that their needs were not met during their freshman year. One student said, "if I'd only realized the importance of the ninth grade to my success in high school". That sentiment was echoed. The importance of ninth grade to the overall success of these students was the sentiment of many of those student leaders. Many said, "if I'd only known how important that those grades would be in ninth grade, I would have worked harder". Maybe it wasn't important at the time, but many students felt that it would probably impact their ability to get scholarships or finish higher in their class than where they were presently situated. We have many kids say that they took the ninth grade lightly, they kind of pushed it off as something not too important, and maybe that's tied to

the transition from a middle school to a high school, we're not quite sure.

Before we moved to these Freshman Centers we were in an 8-9 configuration. We had an 6-7 grade configuration and an 8-9 which again, was a configuration driven by the availability of buildings.

We are talking about complex change. There are some important considerations in managing complex change that we needed to examine as we were in the information building mode. If you look at the scale, at the top you will note that to have change occur in a positive way, first you have to have a vision. We talked about that vision and involving all of the people in the community in that plan. We have to have certain skills and that means teacher training. Training members of the educational community to understand what happens in a ninth grade or help define what happens in a ninth grade or freshman center became the most critical issue. We couldn't ask teachers to come back after the school day and work three to five hours on a project, on a restructuring project, without some kind of incentive; monitory, career ladder or other. So we had to look at what we did with incentives. Resources. We had to give the resources to the teachers to help pull off this program. We will talk to you a little bit more about the resources when we get into the design of the program.

Action plan development follows the development of a strategic plan. An action plan has the goals clearly identified and those strategies that support those goals. If you have all of those pieces in place, hopefully your complex change process will come off without too many hitches. Again, if any of these pieces are missing, you have some problems from confusion, to false starts and others. We hopefully have all those pieces in place now, but it has taken us a year and a-half to get them in place. Again, we don't have a panacea here. We're muddling through this process, hopefully making a difference with these kids as we move through it.

Again, this is all about leadership. Leadership is a key issue that needs to become the central focus of the change process and it must come from all members of the educational community. We

can talk about site-based decision making and put parents on our committees, but if those parents don't feel that they have a say, and a voice, and are listened too, then we're failing as educational leaders in bringing the community along and it comes back to haunt us later.

Linda Darling- Hammond (1993) has described several significant research studies that describe how an empowered total community effort is needed to bring about meaningful school reform. Various studies, over a ninety-five year period, have been examined with findings which indicate that the successful schools have been established as a result of the work of committed individuals willing to search and struggle to find a common course of action for change.

We talked about incentives. One of the most powerful incentives for our teachers and parents was feeling that what they were doing would make a difference for their student. They had a feeling that their ideas would be listened to by the administration and by the teachers. That they too, would be part of this team. That is what we tried to do and are still doing with our model. An old superintendent once said to me, to run a successful organization you've got to keep in mind three important elements. 1)You've got to keep in mind the people that you work with and involve them in the planning process. 2) You've got to give those people the tools to do the job, and 3) you have to provide positive working conditions for things to happen in that organization.

We think in our plan we've moved in those directions. We even let the school board get involved. Any school board members in here? Sometimes we try to do things with little or no input from the school board. I'd be careful here but they've heard it before. I've been thrown out of executive sessions of the school board for speaking my mind, but I'm still here. We have involved the school board and sometimes they operate, and its our fault, they operate with not enough information. They are not involved in the process from the start and then you come into a school board meeting and a work session for an hour and try to get those people up to speed. They discuss, maybe in another meeting, and then take an action. We've tried to involve our school board from day one with involvement on several of these committees. As a result, they have had some major input into the design of the program before it even went to them for approval.

Again, it is building that team concept, breaking down those barriers of fear with those people and putting them on the same team or same playing field as those of us that are out in the trenches. They had a major impact on how we designed our units of credit and what was required of that ninth grade center.

Let's look at the basic design of this program and the administration and staff identification and their selection. We went through the process of coming up with the idea of a vision. We collected the information and then we set up a committee, with school board involvement, on how a grade configuration would look. After six months of work they decided to go with a 6, 7, 8 middle school concept in grade configuration. Then they went with a ninth grade Freshman Center concept. We happen to have two old building and so we were able to pull this off. That goes back to the building issue, having the space. We've noticed that in several locations around the country those districts that have moved into this Freshman Center or ninth grade configuration have done it using older facilities. There is one in Alexander, VA., one outside of Atlanta, GA.

We actually identified our administration a year before the school opened. We hired these two gentlemen and they worked for a year planning and designing this program. They didn't go into it the summer before the school was going to open to work on the planning and design. We found the funds, with board support, to bring these two on a year before the school opened. In addition, we felt we needed some teacher leaders and we worked closely with the Cache Education Association because we wanted to do some unique things with our teachers. We wanted to identify five teacher leaders at each of those two sites a year before the school opened. We were able to do that. We had an open application for any teacher that wanted to be involved and we did not pull those folks out of the classroom. If the funds had been available we would have, but we provided incentives in other ways. We provided them extra funds through stipends, we paid them for training, and we paid them to go and visit other sites around the country that had similar programs or an existing 9-12 high school program that has schools within a school or ninth grade houses.

Again, we had to put money up front. If you don't put money up front in the development, you are going to have a rough time or a rougher time than we had. A year before we opened our schools we brought in ten teachers and two administrators. I can get back at him now. We selected those key people early. The entire staff was selected by Christmas time of the year before the ninth grade configuration program was operational. Again, we asked teachers to openly apply or request a move into the ninth grade program or stay in the 6,7,8 schools were there would be openings. By having our staff in place by Christmas of the year prior to the school opening enabled us to do some things. After the Christmas break we went right into the strategic planning process. We brought all of those people together, we brought parents together, and our administration and we built a strategic plan around those two programs.

At the same time we developed the strategic plan we build site-based decision making committees. It's important to recognize that the function of the site-based decision making committee, as we see it, is one of making decisions that will have an impact on student learning and student achievement. Our site-based decision making committees don't deal in all of those little things that an administrator deals with in a school, when to run the fire drills, when to call for emergency back-up in a situation, things of that nature. Those site-based committees were brought together to make decisions based on curriculum and instruction and any other issue relating to improving student achievements. It was our position that the administrator in the school was still the CEO of that school. We wanted to pattern this model after what's working in business and industry, in organizational structures where we flatten out the top and make it a level planning playing field for all of those people involved. So we moved in that direction. We also wanted to move as much of the budgeting as possible to the site where those people making decisions about student achievement programs would have the funds to help carry those decisions out.

Curriculum, accountability and quality control are important elements of ninth grade program development. We wanted to align the written, taught and tested curriculum (English, 1992). The alignment also compliment an articulated curriculum in the middle schools and high schools. We

also wanted to build into place curriculum threads that were tied to inter-disciplinary studies. We believe that many of the inter-disciplinary programs that work in the middle schools, will be effective in the ninth grade and high school programs. The next important key was to build into place a technology-based learning and data driven environments. Our initial notion was to give a laptop computer to ever student. We didn't have the funding to do ultimately accomplish this task. We wrote many grants. We approached IBM, Compac, and Apple, and other people. We talked about the concept and it still is a good one, but we don't have the funds at this point to pull that off. We do, however, have a writing lab, an applied technology lab and computers in every teacher's classroom. The computers in the classroom are laptops so that teachers can actually use them outside of the four walls of the regular classroom. Our intent in this ninth grade program was to break down classroom walls. We want to re-examine the nature of the classroom. Learning takes place everywhere in the community and bringing portability to the learning process, through the technology, enhances student and teacher opportunities to learn. We are still playing with this important idea. The central concept of the program was that we wanted the curriculum to drive the technology, however, not the other way around.

The important elements of that ninth grade program have been described, please ask questions at any time. Do you have any questions about this design?

Q Why have you segregated the ninth grade?

A We don't look at it as segregating the ninth graders. We looked at a various array of configurations. We looked at what we could do given our building, our budgets, and the 125 buses that we have to deal with. It came down to two issues. One was to create what we would call mega middle schools. If you read the literature you know that middle school folks tell us that when you get above 800 students in a middle school you begin to run into problems with trying to do things like inter-disciplinary teaming and student advisories and some of those other pieces. Our sister school district had a 1400 student middle school and it had many problems with numbers that high. We wanted to keep our middle schools numbers down to around 800 to 900

and eliminate what we call mega middle school motion. We wanted to look at a ninth grade center program. We didn't come upon this, we didn't dream this up, and it wasn't something that was unique to our place. We looked around and we found some. Orlando, FL., has five of them, Redland, CA., Oregon has a few, there are some in the upper mid-west. We looked and we talked and we visited and again, we looked at how they were arranged, how those kids would have access to high school programs, and we felt very comfortable with it. We don't see it as isolation, we see it as a way to provide a safety net for these kids. Again, looking back at the discussions we had with high school students. Most of which said that where they stumbled a little bit in high school was in ninth grade. They didn't know what they would be faced with. They didn't know how much organization they had to have, how to deal with numbers of classes and how to deal with studying and taking tests which were a little bit more complex than they had to deal with at the middle school level. We heard all this stuff from the kids and we were concerned about the isolation, but as we've observed these kids interact for the last year and one- half we have found that they feel very good about that school climate. We took a chance moving into that mode, but we were driven by the available buildings. If our committee had known they had $20,000,000 to build new buildings then maybe they would have looked at something different, but we didn't.

We are looking now at building two new buildings for the ninth grade and our board is very unsure about what to do. Do they want to put the ninth grade right near the high school or do they want to keep it four to five miles away? My own personal feelings from looking at our program over the last year and a half is that we locate those ninth grade facilities on or near the high school campus, so that the ninth graders can get access, especially to after school programing like marching band, orchestra, and during school programs, a higher level foreign language, and some of the other speciality programs that we can't offer in a ninth grade setting.

The important thing that we're looking at is how you transition these students from middle school to high school. I think you could do it in a high school if you could maintain a school within a school sort of arrangement. I believe that we experienced difficulty when we had the

eighth and ninth graders together because you really are trying to run two really two different student populations. An eighth grade group which is still the middle school, meaning a middle school sort of approach and ninth graders where it just doesn't work very well for them. Previously, when we were an eighth and ninth grade school for example, we had a seven period day. A lot of you who are in Jr. Highs or middle schools have a seven period day as well. In that configuration, grade point averages for the ninth grade is kind of where things bottomed out. It was the lowest grade point average for a class year after year after year. It would be a little better as Sophomores and then a quite a bit better later on, partly as they became acclimated to the idea of high school and partly because as you do, we would loose just a few of our students from the low end every year. When we went to a five period day, which is what our high school uses, the grade point averages for the ninth grade went up rather dramatically, triple the number of A's. North Cache Freshman Center has a school of 600 students. We had nearly 100, 4.0's, which was triple the number of 4.0's. Rate of failure remained unchanged. That's a different issue. We found that our better students thrived when we treated them more like high schoolers in terms of the number of periods in a day. We were calling ourselves North Cache Middle School when we were an eighth and ninth grade school and we were teaching Honors Biology and Geometry. It's hard to make those middle school classes, they really are high school classes.

Also, we have a very good relationship with our high schools because we are their Freshman class and they spent a lot of time with us and we spent a lot of time with them. We carry the same colors, the same mascot, and our students are able to participate in all the extra-curricular activities held at the high school. We carry the same activity cards, we are their Freshman class, we're just on a different site and that helps us with dealing with some of the issues that they might have to deal with if they were directly on that campus. That has been a benefit, and we have been able to focus on what we want to focus as a separate grade. The University did a survey for us. They asked our students how they would like to be placed after having been in the Freshman Center. The students, by far, said they would rather be in a ninth grade setting. Definitely their lowest

priority was to be in an eight/nine. They felt like they were more of a part when they were separated and they were unsure about being a ninth grade student at a high school. Of course, they hadn't experienced that, but they liked the idea of being together, united for the first time as a Freshman Center class. We have two middle schools that feed us and this is the first time they joined together as a class. They have started to develop a unity among themselves.

Q How do parents feel about the ninth grade program?

A Parents are very comfortable with the idea. At least our parents are very comfortable with the idea of having those ninth grades, especially the more mature ninth grade girls, off campus, off of the high school campus during the day at least. My kids may still go up there for ball games and dances, and there is a concern there on the part of some of those parents, but they are comfortable with the idea of them not being in a high school.

Q How does your school program work with the high school?

A Let's describe the situation at South Cache Freshman Center. We're running and using the same policies as the high school. We are giving those students a taste of what that high school is going to be like as far as policy goes, but yet we're also giving them a little bit higher expectation than what they had when they were in the middle school because we are trying to be a transition type of school. We are not totally dousing them in the high school like they get when they first come into a traditional 9-12 high school. We feel like we're giving them a little bit better start having them as a separate group, and we feel comfortable with that.

North Cache Freshman Center

The Mission for the North Cache Freshman Center is to promote success, respect, and responsibility while reaching for the future. For us that meant this. This is what we've done so far.

The high school that we feed into, is a very conservative, traditional high school. It has a five period day, and there is no inter-disciplinary teaming going on. Doing a lot of inter-disciplinary teaming, doing a lot of block scheduling is not going to get them ready for that high school, and

we've discovered before, that you really are not going to drive high school reform by sending them different kinds of students. They have to fit the mold that is the high school that they go to. This is what we do. Every students develops an SEOP. It is not a complete SEOP because this goes forward, it is kind of a living document, it goes with them all the way to the end of their high school career. At the end of high school they have about a 45-50 page portfolio that we begin. All the report cards are going in there, all the work experience, narratives are going in there, there really are a number of things that the high school keeps together for them. Maybe it is one of the better things that is accomplished for them.

We spend probably around 15 to 20 hours with kids exploring careers and charting a way through high school, and that really works pretty well. We wanted students to become well organized, so we provide for each of them a student planner. When we were looking at this during our year of planning, there really weren't a lot companies making student planners. What are there in the vendor areas? Maybe seven or eight different companies. I think there is one that we received in our bag at registration, and it has helped a lot. Kids really are writing all of their assignments down. They really are pretty well organized. Communication between school and home has really been facilitated by that, but we have had to work at it. Teachers, have in a lot of cases, had to make sure they wrote the assignment down the same way so the kids get the information.

I have a course outline and objectives of every class. We provide many opportunities for remediation. I had a student in my office the other day, good student, and I explained to him, you know the race for valedictorian can be lost at the first grading period. You are not going to be speaking at graduation if you get this "C" in Geometry, and the first grading period. It shocks them. They think they have got more time, but nobody is taking the time to spend with them. One thing that we do is dismiss school an hour and a half early on Fridays. The teachers spend the afternoon just working with kids in remediation. Then the students can get on a bus and take it to the high school and catch a regular bus home. Ninety eight per cent of the students arrive at and

leave school on school buses. We have practically no population that can walk to school. It is a rural, mostly rural area. The remediation is working well for the kids that need it least. Our Geometry class rooms are jam packed with kids who are disappointed in the "B+" they got on the last test. The kids who are failing, they just can't stay tonight. They just couldn't work it out, and that is something we really have to change. It's a process we're happy with. We have had the opportunity to help a lot of kids. We have really boosted achievement levels for a lot of kids, but it wasn't the group of kids that we set out to help.

In our school students have fewer opportunities to be recognized for their achievements. This is one we really have to be concerned with in regard to transition. We go out of our way in middle school to reward our kids don't we? Students of the Week, lots of students of the week, lots of rewards, lots of certificates. Lots of things. Then they get to high school and there are still lots of things, but they are kind of cumulative. Lots of rewards for Seniors or people who have lettered in a sport or something like that. Freshman who have been used to the middle school where there are lots of rewards find one thing, it's kind of impersonal at high school. We do a couple of things. We still run a ninth grade intramural program along with intramurals. We play all the other Freshman schools in the Region. We have a high school activity kind of thing going. Also, this is the kind of stuff they were used to in middle school. We sort of provide a transition in that respect anyway.

We are working on technology skills like all of you are. It seems like we can never get enough computers. When we get them we make labs. It is still hard for us to have computers available for them when they want to use them. Teachers will be provided with training and opportunities to keep abreast of educational trends. I don't know how it works in you high schools, but a few years ago when we had ninth graders in the high school, it worked like this. Ninth graders tended to get teachers who were very young in their career. They were just starting out. They were hoping to put in their time, gain some seniority so they could teach AP or something else. Maybe they were people who were really dissatisfied. They were coaches that we kind of fired from

coaching, but we really couldn't fire from teaching so we found them a place. They were teaching Freshman. So these students were coming in needing to sort of be transitioned a little bit here, needing our best, and were getting anything but our best. One thing I think we did accomplish is the people who were teaching freshman because they were kind of low on the totem pole are maybe teaching sophomores now and Freshman who are starting their experience here at the high school, I think, are getting a little bit better group of teachers than they had when they were in the high school setting.

Questions related to North Cache Freshman Center

Q What type of schedule are you on?

A We are on a five period trimester. That has some advantages and disadvantages. A five period day is a real advantage as far as achievement is concerned. Trying to get it done in 120 days instead of 180, not particularly good. Taking twelve weeks off in between the first and second half of Spanish I or Geometry, not a particular advantage, but only having five teachers to satisfy, we've seen that boost achievement really significantly.

Q Do you have an advisory program?

A Yes, the advisory class is separate from the five period day and it is where we have fallen short of our objective. I don't know exactly why it is. You want to accomplish a lot in your advisory class and in our case we couldn't get kids to come. The tardiness was astronomical. Truancy was way higher than any other real class. We had high school credit, we give them a grade for it, and we start getting in the way of the relationship that we wanted to have in forming an advisory class. Please, if you don't do anything else, if you've got advisory class working at ninth grade or higher in your school would you leave me your card. I've really got to come and see it to believe it. See what it is you're doing. It has been a real problem for us. It is the biggest problem we have. In fact, we're thinking about how to take what we wanted to accomplish in advisory class, in terms of getting them to understand what high school was about, some of the school skills sort of things, some of the relationship building, and how we can build that back into the curriculum. Advisory is

killing me!

Q Can't you do many of these things in a traditional high school?

A Yes sir ... I think you are right on the head here. You can do any of this regardless of where you've got the ninth grade. If you've got them at the high school, I think you can do the same stuff, but you've got to do more. What we've been doing in the way of transition pretty much is this. Regardless of whether they were in high school or middle school is saying, hey buddy, you'd better get a clue here because they don't take that in high school. In high school it counts. All we do is make the situation more stressful. We tell them how important it is, but at some point we really have to be working with them.

Q Are you making a difference?

A I think so. The problem before was it took them so long to kind of figure out what high school was about. As I said before under our old system, sophomores had the lowest grade point average, they got a little better as seniors and then they improved dramatically as juniors. They just kind of figured it out. Somebody needs to really help them figure it out in the first few years. I don't thing there is anything we are doing, that you would say would be inappropriate. I really think we do a pretty good job of recognizing achievement for juniors and seniors, for kids who can letter in sports or for kids that are earning scholarships. When you are freshman you're earning that recognition, but the recognition is deferred. So I do think you have to consider some of these things as being special for freshman.

Q Do you have teaming in your school?

A Yes. I have a little team starting next fall in English and Social Studies, but there is no teaming at all at the high school I'm feeding into. In terms of getting them ready for high school, it doesn't apply to me. It may more to Mike. I think they do more up there.

Q Is the curriculum articulated through high school?

A Well there aren't too many issues of articulation. There are not too many things that .. I can't answer that very well.

Q How well are you doing with remediation?

A We're working real hard with them to see that they get it before they move on. Michael has had better success than I have at this sort of thing, but we're teaching them in the class after school. They come, they pay a fee, they work at it. However, these programs are available to anybody that wants to take advantage of that program and can't afford it. We've had some marginal successes with that. We run a summer school program and we have retained kids for a trimester. They will let them stay with us just until Thanksgiving time before they can rejoin their peers, and we have kept them for a year if they have failed a lot of classes. Even at that, I think we've kept four or five back and it really has been successful with a couple. The others are keeping it at the same level they did the first time around. I think we are all struggling with that.

South Cache Freshman Center

Our mission statement is unique. The last statement that the South Cache Freshman Center staff put in our Mission Statement was to be a "Yoda" for every student. Remember Luke Skywalker in Star Wars. When he first met Yoda, what did he think of him? He didn't think Yoda could teach him anything. They really did not have much respect for Yoda or even recognize who he was. What we try to do at our school is to try to get the students to realize that we are there to help them, and we can teach them things that will empower them if they will give us that chance. First of all we try to develop a relationship with them so that they have that trust and confidence with us. The students at South Cache are fortunate in the fact, that my students are transitioning into a high school where they are fairly progressive. They are not yet teaming. I have two middle schools that feed me, and both those middle schools are teaming. When they come to my school we do teaming, and in just a minute I'll put a schedule up that shows you how our typical day looks for a student. We do have teaming and our high school is looking at starting teaming with the tenth grade because the students feel that it is a benefit for them. Our high school is changing because they are seeing what our students want. That we see as a good attribute. We are making an effect there. Also, a big part of the transitioning of our students is like I said, our high school is

very proactive and they do a lot of competency based teaching at the high school.

Some of our objectives is to earn the required credits to advance to the tenth grade. The school board made an important commitment to the issue of student retention. Our school board actually passed what they call the Ninth Grade Remediation Policy. They identified that a ninth grade student needed to have five credits to progress onto the tenth grade. One credit of English, Geography, Math, and one credit Elective. One half credit of Healthy Life Styles and Applied Technology. Most of the students at my school fill the elective credit with a Science. There is a minimum of five that they have to have to progress on to the high school. Now what happens if they don't get those five credits. At the end of our first year we had twelve students out of 535 who did not meet that criteria. That then becomes part of our remediation program. We have a very high involvement with our teams. The teams provide the remediation. The credits that are discussed are primarily those elements that are involved in the team process. The team provides time during the trimester for remediation to happen during the day. There is a big push for remediation at our mid-term or mid-trimester time and personal conferences with parents and students at about the sixth and the ninth week. We just don't assume that students are going to pick up their grade and move on. We make a big effort in bringing parents and students in for a one on one conference when they hit the sixth week and the ninth week of the trimester. That seems to be very effective for us.

At the end of the trimester we had 41 students who needed remediation and wanted the required credits that our school board requires. We had 37 students attend the after school remediation. It was a week and a half process and all of our 37 students made up the credit and received a passing grade. Remediation is one of the biggest emphasizes for our students. There was two or three students who didn't make it up, but we can't catch everybody and once you involve parents and students sooner or later they have to take that responsibility. We will provide for them everything that we possibly can.

We do work in integrated interdisciplinary units and we do have a mastery level set at 70%. Here again, I'm talking about transition. At our high school most of the courses are taught on a competency mastery level. In transitioning I did not, at our school, want to take on the outcome based model for the high school. I did not want to fight that battle for them, but I will transition the students so that when they get to that high school they are familiar with it. One of our classes, Geography, is taught in an outcome based mode where they work with a 70% mastery. All of our subjects are listed out in competencies, however, and students are graded based on the competencies.

SEOP's (Student Educational and Occupational Plans) are a big part of our school program. This is the first time that we get our students together, with parents, and begin the process of putting together a four year plan so that students can see what is ahead for them in grade 10,11 and 12. We have parents there while we are sitting down and putting together this initial plan.

This is what a typical schedule looks like for a student in our school (Please refer to Figure 1.).

We also have an early Friday release. (That is on this side.) We set up our schedule like this. There is a team block with a five period trimester. The team can be any block of two classes that are together, be it first or second, second or third or fourth and fifth. We keep a block together, and within that team we have the three subjects, English, Geography and Science. Last year we had Health and PE involved in the team. This year we left them out of it. The class is held every day and the team can teach either in the afternoon or in the morning, and the team has all the flexibility to do whatever they want with the curriculum. It is these three teacher's job to make sure that they are each allocating enough time for their specific subject. It is up to that team of teachers to decide how they allocate their time. Maybe they will have their specific subjects for both periods that day and there will be no class break. Maybe they will break after forty minutes. It is totally up to the team, they are driving their own time. They can regroup the students anytime they want to regroup them. If after the first six weeks they need to do some breaking up of some students, they have that flexibility. That creates a headache for us in the office at times. If a parent

comes in and wants to get their student, sometimes it takes a bit longer to find that student based on where they are in the team that day. I think, however, that it is more important to give the teachers the flexibility to work within their curriculum than to put me out in the office, but we do have to deal with that issue, and that is a pretty big issue.

Questions related to South Cache Freshman Center

Q Don't you use the same approach in both schools?

A We've allowed our schools to take different directions and the directions taken by those schools reflect community wants and needs. The North end of our district is very traditional and as such, they come to expect a traditional type of high school. This ninth grade program to be successful needs and to take into account the unique nature of that community and the teachers on staff. He has got to move slower, more carefully and bring that community along. We are a district that is kind of shaped like a donut. In the center of the donut is a city district which creates a north and south border to our district. We have a north end and a south end split by the district that is located in the city. On the South end, for some reason, it has turned into a more progressive environment. The parents have been more receptive to some of that change and as such the principal of the high school and Mike have been able to move faster with their reform. We are moving as fast as the community will let us move. We are involving them, giving them the information and I think that is the way it should be. The community should move as fast as they feel comfortable moving.

There is another aspect that we haven't talked about and that is. It is a traditional high school in the north end. It's achievement level is based on SAT tests that are a lot higher. I think because of that, there is a hey, whatever you do, you don't want to screw this up kind of mentality going. As far as innovation is concerned, it is a lot more fertile soil than in the south end where they are saying, we've got to turn this thing around, we've got to do something, anything. So that is kind of at work here too.

Q How does Special Education fit into teaming?

A At South Cache we have the Resource Special Education students involved in every team. I have three teams at my school. We also have the more traditional situation. Special Education teachers may come in and do the co-teach within the team, but they may be pulled out for a math class.

This is my Monday through Thursday schedule (Please refer to Figure 1). Friday, students are released at 1:20 p.m. and I have team planning time. This is a time for teams to get together. We looked at different models, and our model still does not meet all the needs of the team as far as getting together and having a planning time. Many models provide team planning time as well as prep every day for the team, but we can't afford that. Our school board did provide one hour and 20 minutes once a week where the team can get together and plan and organize the interdisciplinary units which has been very successful at our school. Our high school has recognized this and is also moving in this direction in order to involve some of their tenth grade.

Q Why isn't math included in the team?

A One of the reasons we don't have math in the team format is that it tends to group the students. Math is a group subject, be it Algebra, Geometry or the basic Math. That definitely groups your team and we didn't want any type of a grouping to happen.

Q What about Social Studies?

A We do have Geography. We don't have History in the ninth grade.

Q Are you equipped to combine large groups or vary groups of students?

A That would be a great setting. The only facility we have to do that in is an auditorium. If you could build a building to facilitate teaming, that would be a great way to go. It would be great to design a school like conference centers are designed. One where you can move walls and create different configurations, but that is a tough item to sell to a board and to an architect.

Q Do you remediate students on Friday's?

A We don't do the remediation at our school on Fridays. That is done through the teams during

the regular school day. This time is specifically for team planning. All departments get together, even those that are not part of the team. I am a little jealous of what Greg has. He has been able to work that out, but at the same time our remediation has been very effective through the teams.

Q Do you have an Advocacy Program?

A What students do is stay in the class that they are in. At this point, it is one of the things that we are still yet developing. The types of things that we will take care of in school business, if we need, we will tie in here. For example, if the counselor comes down from Mountain Crest and needs to do some particular work with a student, we tie those types of things into there or any general type of subject that we want to cover with the whole school, things the staff will take on. We are a long ways from development on that, but our middle schools have a very strong student advocacy program.

Q How long is your school year?

A We have to meet the 990 hours. That is the standard that we must have in a school year. Our Superintendent set a minimum of a thousand and we have to work to that standard. (1000 hours, 180 days.) The school board was very supportive in providing this for us. Mountain Crest High School is also participating in this program. This being their first year of participation.

Q Where are the students on Friday at 1:20?

A They have gone home. During our team planning time, students have gone home. This is where teachers are together.

Conclusion and Final Questions

Gerald Bracey (1995), mentioned that in some his research he has found that all children need academically enriched environments. If you give every child an environment that is academically enriched, that goes beyond the stand and deliver lecture, that goes beyond what you would see in a traditional classroom, that every child will be impacted in a positive way. I think in the case of these two schools, we've tried to encourage the faculty and administration to move into an environment that engages every student and that academically challenges those students. This is

what we have produced and we would invite any of you to come and visit us or talk to us via e-mail or conventional mail.

At this point are there an additional questions? It's more important that we continue to answer questions about the programs.

Q How did you develop the program?

A We provided segments of planning time during the course of the year where we would bring the people together and pay them for their time. We allowed them to determine when they would meet and how often they would meet as a staff. We gave them flexibility in terms of attending conferences and visiting other schools. They had total flexibility there. We were able to secure a grant through the State Office of Education, through the State Superintendent in Utah which was called An Experimental and Developmental Grant because the state office is very keen on looking at new ways to do things. We were able to convince them to give us some funding to go after this program. We gave the staff in each of those two buildings flexibility to chart their own course with a leader at the helm. Basically, they took their own direction as far as what areas of staff development they wanted to focus on, how they wanted to meet, and what conferences they could go to in order to help them meet those needs.

The North Cache staff had an early interest in what we call competency based learning, so we provided some training in that area. We developed a training program on how to effectively run site-based decision making groups focusing on conflict resolution and team building. Each staff looked at their own strengths and tried to build on their weaknesses and then follow-up training was scheduled.

Q Where did you get the funding to design the program?

A Experimental and developmental funds, available throught the Utah State Offce of Education, were used to plan, design and then implement the program. Further, in Utah, the Governor has what is call the Centennial School Plan. It is through application. If you are awarded that Centennial School status, that brings quite a bit more funding into your school. The application

process united our school staffs. Our strategic plan, which is really a Centennial Plan was sent into the State and we were funded to complete the plan. Every teacher in has been involved in the process, as well as classified staff and parents.

Q Do you transition with the middle school?

A Your question was how do we transition from the middle school to the ninth grade school. That is one of the reasons we wanted to keep the teaming. We have students coming to us from two feeder schools that are used to teaming for most of the day. We wanted to maintain the teaming because of the comfort level, but at the same time experience the five period day. They are involved in the team for two periods a day, this maintains their comfort zone. Then they go into three periods which are the longer periods which they will experience at the high school. So we are giving them a taste of what the schedule will feel like, but yet they are not running that whole schedule all day long. We also work with them as far as, and I mentioned this before, policies. Our policies are the same as at the high school and we're letting them get a feel for what they are going to get when they reach that high school without really hammering them real hard. Some of those policies are pretty tough.

Q How do you individualize programs for students?

A The Counselor's at all three levels, middle, freshman, and high school, work very closely together through what they call a Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program. This SEOP that we talked about, Student Education and Occupational Plan, is actually a plan we initiate in sixth grade and will carry through grade twelve. We're trying to build that transition now through that SEOP process where students and parents both sit down and chart a course of action for that student.

Q Are there vocational programs in your schools?

A We have two Applied Technology labs in our school. Applied technology is a big part of our ninth grade program. One-half of a credit of Applied Technology is required, by the school board, for every student.

The automotive and the agricultural systems classes are at the high school. Actually those conventional vocational programs have been moved out of the high school into our area Applied Technology Center. What we focus on, with applied technology education, in our ninth grade and high schools is in the area of cad design. One of our ATE classes is building an airplane, more of the applied stuff, integrating math and science into the applied technology as well as the school to work stuff. We have an Applied Technology Center located regionally in all the areas of the state, so a lot of the traditional vocational programing has gone to those centers.

Q Is remediation working?

A The South Cache program is working a little bit better than the North Cache program at this point due to its strong student remediation program. Remediation is actually built into the team process and the team controls its operation and works it into part of the regular day. At North Cache, it is separate from the regular day.

Friday afternoon is the worst time of the week if you're expecting kids to stay. The reason we adopted this program is because one of our feeder middle schools, which is basically on the same campus, was moving in that direction. Their school had been into it the year before, also one of our elementary schools. The staff had all picked Friday afternoon. I'd really rather see a Tuesday or Wednesday or any other day of the week or perhaps the first part of the day rather than the end of the day.

We've had several staff members from other school districts come and visit and look at the ninth grade program. Most are looking at developing a school within a school, or a ninth grade within a nine through twelve traditional school. Lots of schools are doing that, but some are building new ninth grade centers that are separate from the high school

Q What about elective programs?

A We offer the traditional type of electives. We have band, orchestra, speech, drama, foreign language, art, choral, and guitar.

Q At the South Cache Freshman Center, how many teams do you have and do you have conflicts with electives?

A We have three teams meeting at different times. Actually I have five different team sessions that I can fit students into. Conflict of electives has not been a problem. If I was closer to the high school, right now I'm two miles away from the high school, yet a separate facility, that would probably give some acceleration needs to students. Being separated I can't really provide for all the needs, but I don't really have a lot of students whose needs I'm not meeting that way.

Q How is discipline in the schools?

A Before we came in as principals of these schools, people were sending cards saying you poor thing, taking on the ninth grade. We were a little worried about it because unfamiliarity with ninth grade students. We both had middle school backgrounds and therefore have less discipline problems with the ninth grade alone, than I ever had in the middle school. Having the ninth graders alone has generated very few discipline problems. We do have some problems with vandalism. I don't know if it is just the age. Both freshman center buildings were erected around 1920. The schools look more like canneries than schools. We don't know if it is because the students are only there for a year or because it is just hard to respect this dilapidate old building or what. But vandalism, and litter are real problems. Probably mostly just the age. It is hard to take a lot of pride in a school when you are spending one year in the worst looking school you will spend in K-12 in Cache County.

Q How do you feel about having this one year class of students?

A That's our biggest worry. That we will lose some effectiveness by only having them for a year. We just maybe get a handle on some of our problems with a particular group of students and then we pass them on to the high school where they have to again get acclimatized to a new environment. For that reason, perhaps a school within a school, with a high school makes more sense.

Q Do you find parents non-supportive of the program?

A No, we don't think so. Parents are very supportive of the ninth grade program. They recognize the importance of providing their children with a transition into the academics, activities, and programs in the high school.

Q How many students are in your schools? How many administrators?

A At the South Cache Freshman Center we have 510 students and at North Cache 600 students. We both have an Assistant Principal. Just whatever I don't want to do. Discipline is a shared responsibility. Our assistants prepare discipline reports, handles busing, keys, etc. There is not really a solid line on who does what. We work together as a team in this thing, but you do need an assistant principal.

Q How do you organize your teams at South Cache?

A We give them a block of time. Three teachers have an x amount of students for a block of time and they group them the way they feel is best for the students.

Q How big are your classes?

A That is based on our FTE's (teacher/student ratio) and can be anywhere from 90 to 100 students on a team depending on how we are funded from the state.

Q Intramurals?

A Yes. They work absolutely independent of themselves. One is a structured lunch time thing where we will have teams and tournaments, a variety of whatever we have going. Basketball is always going in the gym, unless we are doing indoor soccer. We do other things as well. We have had chess tournaments, football, and table tennis in addition to what we play in the gyms.

Q What about competitive sports?

A Anything that involves a freshman team in our region we field. In Utah that would mean that we would have football for boys, volleyball for girls, and basketball for both sexes. Baseball for boys, softball for girls starts next year. In the case of the other sports where there aren't freshman teams they catch a bus to the high school. We had a freshman boy that did pretty well in the state

wrestling tournament just recently. So they can participate as freshman just like they do in most 7-12 configurations, but if it is a sport where there is a freshman team, it is done at our school.

Q How do kids get involved in intramurals?

A That's just a choice. They just sign up. At North Cache Freshman Center, we pay two teachers a day to go in and supervise the activities. The South Cache Freshman Center has an athletic director, on our side, organizes and takes care of all the after school types of events.

Q If you fail a class is there a way to make up the grade?

A If you fail first trimester Geography, you can plan on the second week into the second trimester having an after school session to make that up. There are four sessions and each session is two hours long.

Q What kind of grade is earned in remediation?

A All a student comes out of the remediation session with is a passing grade. It is the team of Geography teachers who decide what curriculum will be taught in that after school remediation class. They are being paid a stipend to do that. That comes from district funds.

We appreciate the many questions asked by the participants in this session. The best of luck to you as you consider what's best for the ninth graders you serve in your respective school districts.

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South Cache Freshman Center - Modified 6 period Trimester

In the Team block, the subjects will be taught as an A/B roll-over (unless the team has arranged a team project).
The Applied Tech / Career Center (AT/CC) can be taken all 3 trimesters.
A third trimester of Math can be taken by students who need additional Math credit.
Band students may take AT/CC for 1 trimester.
Wednesday, students are dismissed at 1:20 for Team planning / staff development.
94-95 schedule offered students 7 credits (not including Seminary). This schedule provides students 7 to 7.5 credits.

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Team Block 8:00 - 10:55 English Geography Science Health / PE	Team Block 8:00 - 10:55 English Geography Science Health / PE	Team Block 8:00 - 10:25 English Geography Science Health / PE	Team Block 8:00 - 10:25 English Geography Science Health / PE	Team Block 8:00 - 10:55 English Geography Science Health / PE
		Advisory 10:25 - 10:35	Advisory 10:25 - 10:35	
Advisory 10:55 - 11:05	Advisory 10:55 - 11:05	Lunch 10:35 - 11:05	Remediation / Enhancement 10:40 - 11:40	Advisory 10:55 - 11:05
Lunch 11:05 - 11:35	Lunch 11:05 - 11:35	Math 40 min / Math 40 min / Elective 40 min	Lunch 11:40 - 12:10	Lunch 11:05 - 11:35
Math 55 min / Math 55 min / Elective 55 min	Math 55 min / Math 55 min / Elective 55 min	AT/CC 40 min / AT/CC 40 min / Elective 40 min	Math 45 min / Math 45 min / Elective 45 min	Math 55 min / Math 55 min / Elective 55 min
AT/CC 55 min / AT/CC 55 min / Elective 55 min	AT/CC 55 min / AT/CC 55 min / Elective 55 min	Elective - 40 min (full year or 3 trimesters)	AT/CC 45 min / AT/CC 45 min / Elective 45 min	AT/CC 55 min / AT/CC 55 min / Elective 55 min
Elective - 60 min (full year or 3 trimesters)	Elective - 60 min (full year or 3 trimesters)	Staff development 1:20 - 3:10	Elective - 45 min (full year or 3 trimesters)	Elective - 60 min (full year or 3 trimesters)

Figure 1. The 1995-96 South Cache Freshman Center schedule.

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